

On July 16, the Church celebrated the memorial of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Whenever you hear a title for our Holy Mother like: “Our Lady of _____” and it’s a place (like Fatima or Lourdes, for example) it almost always means that Mary appeared there. Our Lady of Mount Carmel, however, is a little bit of an exception. Let’s start with a little history which will help answer the questions of: what is the significance of Mount Carmel and what, if anything, is the connection to the Carmelite order?

When I was kid and I heard “Mount Carmel” I always thought of this chewy, brown, caramel candy called caramels. But of course Mt Carmel has nothing to do with the candy! At the same time, however, the name does carry with it a certain connotation of sweetness because the word *carmel* means something like ‘garden,’ implying a place of beauty, peace, safety, and tranquility. In fact, ‘Carmel’ is used multiple times in the Old Testament as a symbol of beauty and glory. Isaiah, for example, speaks of the glory of Carmel and as something lush and fruitful. Song of Songs also refers to the beauty of Carmel. In warning the Israelites about God’s punishment if they didn’t repent, the prophet Amos said that even Carmel’s beauty will wither.

According to scholars, the Hebrew word ‘*kerem*’ means vineyard; of course ‘El’ is an Old Testament name for God (Elohim) and so *kerem-el* (Carmel) can also be taken to mean: the vineyard (or garden) of God.

Mt Carmel is a mountain range in the northern part of Israel. It is most well known as the place where the great prophet Elijah, through whom many miracles were worked in the Old Testament, dispensed with the false prophets of false gods that had infiltrated Israel. The Israelites, including the King (Ahab) and his wicked wife Jezebel, had turned to the worship of these false gods. There were 850 of these so-called prophets of these false gods. The only prophet of the one true God left in Israel at the time was Elijah. So Elijah had them all assembled for, we might say, a showdown. Whoever called down fire from Heaven to burn their sacrificial offering would be the prophet(s) of the true God. When the false prophets failed, Elijah mocked them saying things like: call louder, maybe the god you’re calling on is taking a nap or has gone on a journey! When Elijah called on the one true God, fire struck and burned up his offering. The false prophets were slain. And all of this occurred on...Mount Carmel. Elijah, a true servant of the Lord, weeded the garden of an infestation of evil.

While there are other references to Carmel in Scripture – e.g., Elisha apparently lived on Carmel for a time – Carmel is most generally associated with Elijah. At the very least, the prophet Elijah figures significantly into Mount Carmel. Carmel and Elijah – this is the most common connection for Carmel.

Now what about Mt Carmel and the Carmelite religious order? Is there a connection between the two? Well the Carmelites have a unique and perhaps even somewhat mysterious beginning compared to other religious orders. Most religious orders were started by a single founder; examples would be St Francis for the Franciscans (Order of Friars Minor), St Dominic for the Dominicans (Order of Preachers), St Benedict, and St Ignatius of Loyola (Jesuits) to name a few more. The Carmelites do not have such a founder. Instead, what happened was that in the late 1100’s a number of people (believed to be Europeans) came to the holy site of Mt Carmel to live as hermits, completely dedicated to God, following the example of Elijah. It seems that they formed a sort of hermetic community, living a life of prayer and penance. At some point in the early 1200’s they asked the Patriarch of Jerusalem for a rule of life. A “Rule of Life” is something common to all religious orders. St Benedict was perhaps one of the first to establish one in the Western world, and St Benedict lived in the 500’s. So this would have been something well known by the time the original pilgrims came to Carmel in the late 1100’s. This eventually led to the establishment of the Carmelite Order. Part of the original Rule of Life was to come together daily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. A chapel was built for this purpose, dedicated to our Holy Mother. To this day, the Carmelites have a strong devotion to both Elijah and our Holy Mother.

But now we need to come to Our Lady of Mt Carmel. The Carmelite Order spread fairly rapidly into Europe. In the mid-1200’s there was a good and holy *English* Carmelite by the name of Simon Stock (now *Saint* Simon Stock). In 1251, our Holy Mother appeared to Simon Stock in Aylesford, England and gave him a brown, woolen scapular, saying: “This shall be a privilege for you and all Carmelites, that anyone dying in this habit shall not suffer eternal fire.” In time, the Church extended this magnificent privilege to all the laity who are

willing to be invested in the Brown Scapular of the Carmelites and who perpetually wear it. The Church implemented the “feast” of Our Lady of Mt Carmel in commemoration of this appearance to St Simon Stock, who was the Superior General of the Carmelite Order.

In the 1300’s, Mary appeared to Pope John XXII and made another promise for those who devoutly wear the Brown Scapular. She had already promised they would not go to hell but now she also told Pope John that if such a person goes to Purgatory after their death, she herself would deliver them from Purgatory on the First Saturday after their death. This is called the “Sabbatine Privilege.” Sabbatine just means “that pertaining to Saturday” so this could also be called “The Saturday Privilege.” Our Holy Mother specified these conditions:

- Wear the Brown Scapular continuously.
- Observe chastity according to one’s state in life (married/single).
- Recite daily the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin OR Observe the fasts of the Church together with abstaining from meat on Wednesdays and Saturdays OR With permission of a priest, say five decades of Our Lady’s Most Holy Rosary OR With permission of a priest, substitute some other good work.

This was officially promulgated by Pope John XXII in what’s called a “Bull.”

These are tremendous promises. We now enroll all 2nd graders in this pastorate in the Brown Scapular – usually at their practice for First Communion. But, anyone can be enrolled. They are enrolled in what’s called “The Confraternity of the Brown Scapular.” This enrollment not only makes the person “eligible” for the promises but also means that they will then have all of these holy Carmelites praying for them.

It is, to put it overly mildly, “unfortunate” that so many people would think so little of our Mother’s promise that those who wear the scapular devoutly will not go to hell. This, along with the Sabbatine Privilege,” are huge promises, almost astounding. Why are there not people beating down the door, begging to be enrolled in the Confraternity of the Brown Scapular? It is because of false belief and a loss of faith. Amongst those who profess some sort of belief in God or Christianity, most think “everybody’s going to Heaven,” nothing to worry about, live free, do what you want. Perhaps this comes from the false Protestant claim of: once saved always saved. Whatever the cause of this popular mentality, it is dooming those who hold it to hell.

Notice that the Scapular has to be worn *devoutly*. The Brown Scapular is not a magic charm. A person cannot put on a Brown Scapular then go out and live a sinful life without any care whatsoever and think they’re going to end up in Heaven. No. You must live a life of faith, live in the way our Lord told us to live, become like our Lord told us to be. The Brown Scapular is *then* an aid, a special promise from our Mother.

Just one last piece of Carmelite history. In the 1500’s many Carmelites had become lax in their practice of living out a life of self-sacrifice to God. St Teresa of Avila then came along and spearheaded a reform, a return to this purpose, to the way of their ancestors. Unfortunately, this led to a split in the Carmelite Order. Those following the reform of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross became: The Order of Carmelite, Discalced (OCD). Discalced just means ‘without shoes.’ I’m pretty sure most Discalced Carmelites wear shoes! But the name discalced is meant to convey an emphasis on the total sacrifice of one’s self to God.

The main focus of this article was the Brown Scapular. However, in the space left we might recall that at the last apparition of Mary in Fatima – the one on October 13th, when the miracle of the sun occurred – Mary appeared to the children, at one point, as Our Lady of Mt Carmel. Many people take this simply as a sign that Lucia was to become a cloistered Carmelite nun, and that’s probably part of it. However, it seems unlikely that that is the only reason. Even in 1917 man had already begun to turn decisively away from God by deciding that he himself would be the supreme being. Socialism had already spread throughout much of Europe and Communism made its inroads just a decade or two later. The message of Fatima was rather simple: penance, penance, penance; repent and return to God, to your loving Father. Relearn the true nature of love – sacrifice of self. The Carmelites, especially those living in cloister, exemplify this. They sacrifice their whole life as an offering to God, and on our behalf. I thank God that we have Carmelites in our diocese and, indeed, right here in our own pastorate. What else can turn back the exceedingly serious judgement of God and bring man back to his senses? Support them in any way you can, as they support us.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn